

The Business Monthly

The Business Newspaper of Howard & Anne Arundel Counties and BWI Business District

Who Says A Website Equals Marketing?



By Carolyn West Price

So, you're thinking about doing a website, or even upgrading your website, huh? You start the process by interviewing designers/developers about such a project since you know how important it

is to not have that do-it-yourself look (right?). While that is a logical beginning, think about taking a step back first—start with determining the objective of your website.

Yes, you read that correctly. What is the “objective” of your site?

Are you using your website for individuals to buy your services—an e-commerce site? Or, is it basically an on-line, easily accessed brochure that will tell people all about you with your hope being that they contact you for more information or to do business?

Once you have identified your objective for the site, you are in a better position to guide the professionals you interview, knowing that an e-commerce site will require much more complex programming than an on-line brochure with a few bells and whistles (articles you may have written, testimonials, tips, etc.)

In addition, your objective will also help you determine what role your website has in your marketing plan. Is your website just one of many communication tools in your bag of tricks or is your website in reality your product?

For instance, if you want to sell your product on the website, the strategy behind your other marketing efforts will be to drive people to your website. You cannot rely on search engines and prayers to get people to your site; you will need to rely on traditional marketing communications to tell the world about you and to compel them to visit your site. Remember, you're asking them to do something, which is not radically different than asking them to physically visit a store.

For that reason, traditional marketing theories need to apply. You need a marketing plan that includes tactics which recognize the role of: Repetition. Consistency. Call to Action. Benefits.

The more targeted your intended audience, the more efficient your marketing can be. For instance, a retailer such as Amazon will need a broad-reach marketing plan. In contrast, a marketer of pet-shaped floral arrangements, such as horses and dogs, will find reaching horse or dog lovers more efficient than an appeal to the general public—especially if their budget is limited.

So many companies invest such a large percentage of their marketing budget into the website development itself that there is little left to tell everyone (or at least the appropriate ones) to visit the site. Don't be left with a great site and no visitors. If you don't have enough money to do a great site and great marketing, you may want to re-think your priorities and develop a phased-in plan that will allow you to start with a professional but basic site, get people to it, and then upgrade it as revenue flows in. As long as your designers/developers know this, they can build the site appropriately to

make upgrades and expansion easier than starting over down the road.

In addition to the suggestions about determining the site's role in your marketing, think about the logical flow and content of your site. A good place to start is by visiting a number of sites and noting what you like as a visitor and what you do not. Do some features impress you or make it easier to tour the site than others? Does it load quickly? What “buttons” do you like? If you are in a professional-service business, think seriously about including a photo and bio of the owners, since people will feel as if they know you even before they've met you, which is one less “touch” you'll need to spend money to make.

On a final note, don't forget to periodically visit your own site or ask some trusted friends or colleagues to do so. This is particularly important since different systems may read your site a bit differently, and this “self-test” will allow you to diagnose problems or issues that relate to function or content before a prospective customer does.

Also, plan to keep your site regularly updated. While this will not only move you up in the search engines (activity on your site gets attention), it will make your site more interesting for repeat visits. Contests, tips, a bulletin, and testimonials are easy elements to weave into your site that will allow for easy updating.

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